Dialogue with NSCN and ULFA

*284. SHRI DRUPAD BORGOHAIN: Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the latest position as regards the dialogue with NSCN (IM) and other militant organisations;

(b) the effect of arrest of General Secretary of NSCN (IM) at Bangkok, on the dialogue; and

(c) the steps taken by Government to have a dialogue with ULFA?

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI L. K. ADVANI): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT

(a) The cease-fire between the Government of India and the NSCN (I/M) is valid till 31.7.2000. Efforts are also being made to engage other underground outfits in the North-East in a dialogue.

(b) The Government of India remains committed to the peace process. The proposed current round of talks with the NSCN (I/M) has, however, been postponed at its request following the arrest of Th. Muivah in Thailand.

(c) The Government is committed to restoration of peace and has extended an invitation to all those who have stayed from the paths of togetherness to come forward for talks within the four corners of our Constitution. The ULFA has, however, not responded for talks so far within the parameters indicated.

SHRI DRUPAD BORGOHAIN: Sir, the hon. Home Minister, in part (a) of his reply, has said that the cease-fire between the Government of India and the NSCN (I/M) is valid till 31.7.2000. Efforts are also being made to engage other underground outfits in the North-East in a dialogue. But the problem does not end there. Sir, I think, there is a parallel Government which is engaged in extortion of money. We have seen that the so-called Government of the People's Republic of Nagalim is extorting money from the public off and on. One such self-styled captain of an illegal Naga Army ordered the oil tanker drivers who collected oil from Khotkhoti Depot situated in Golaghat District of Assam to pay money. On 25th January, he ordered every tanker driver to pay him Rs. 500 per trip for the so-called Naga sovereignty. In the event of their refusal, he threatened to take action, as he deemed fit. Cash receipts were also given to

them. It shows that a parallel authority is operating there. They are operating there with the help of underground outfits. So, Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Home Minister why, under such a situation, his Ministry is not taking steps to expedite the process of dialogue with the militant outfit, i.e., the NSCN, for an early end of such an unbearable situation there.

Secondly, I think the Ministry should, at least, have a dialogue with that outfit to stop such extortions, till the final outcome of the dialogue is known. That is my first supplementary.

SHRI L. K. ADVANI: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the hon. Member is correct when he says that in parts of the North-East, problems of extortion, kidnapping, etc., are serious. His question mainly relates to why in order to deal with the situation, the Government of India is not engaging these militants in some kind of a dialogue. As I have said in my main reply, a dialogue is on with the militants in Nagaland, and there has been an offer made by the Government, including the Prime Minister, when he visited the North-East, that we are willing to talk to these militant groups within the framework of the Indian Constitution; and there has been response from some. I hope to be making a statement in respect of one of the major militant groups there which has been indulging in militant activities for some time, later in the day. But, as it is, I can only say that our approach in this regard is that we are willing to have a dialogue, but that dialogue has to be within certain parameters. A question has been put about ULFA, in particular. I have already said that there has been no response from the ULFA for a dialogue within these parameters. Their insistence is, "you must not say that it should be within the framework of the Constitution;" they say, "you must not insist that we should hold it within the country," etc. Therefore, it has not been possible. From our side, we have made our position very clear.

SHRI DRUPAD BORGOHAIN: Sir, our hon. Home Minister says now that we may have a dialogue within the parameters of our Constitution. I also feel like that but there is some problem there. As regards ULFA, there is a slogan, 'Independent Assam' but that has been rejected by the people, by and large. Most of the people do not agree with this slogan, but this slogan has been taken by the frustrated youths of the State when they could not bear the sheer negligence by the Centre and when they saw that the economic development of the State had been running at a snail's pace. So, to bring back these frustrated youth on to the right track, I think, an unconditional political dialogue is a must. That is my viewpoint.

Now, my question to the hon. Home Minister is, what debars the Ministry from inviting the ULFA to the negotiating table, unconditionally, to hear their viewpoints and to reject them rationally there? They may be brought to the negotiating table directly, without giving any concession. Then, they may be heard and, after that, we can argue with them that that is not possible. That can be done. I think, the Home Minister can do this. I want his answer, Sir.

SHRI L. K. ADVANI: The hon. Member has made a suggestion and that suggestion comes often, but, in the overall context, the Government has taken a certain position which, I think, is a right approach in this context. As the hon. Member himself has said, gradually, the ULFA is losing the support of the people of Assam. The kind of support it had earlier is no longer there. There have been several incidents where villagers themselves have apprehended these ULFA militants and handed them over to the authorities. There has been a process even of their coming back. Many of them are expressing their willingness to abandon arms. I think, this kind of approach should be pursued. Willingness for a dialogue is there, but if anyone says that "I want to discuss with you the question of sovereignty and independence," the Government's stand is, "No, we will not discuss the question of sovereignty and independence but we are willing to discuss any other thing with you."

There is no point in giving an illusion and giving respectability to a movement of this kind. That is not the approach of the Government.

DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Mr. Chairman, Sir, in Assam, the situation due to increased activity of militancy is very grim. The ruling Asom Gana Parishad Ministry, at the cost of their lives, is taking stern action to root out terrorism from the State. We have already lost one Minister, Shri Nagen Sarma, a few days back. There is a threat to other Ministers also. There was an attempt on Hiranya Kumar. On three occasions, attempt was made on the Chief Minister also. Also, there are many Ministers who are on the hit list of the militant groups. I want to know from the hon. Minister as to what action has been contemplated to give adequate security coverage for those who are fighting terrorism there? The second part of my question is with regard to the SULFA. During 1991—96, when Hiteshwar Saikia was the Chief Minister of Assam, the process of surrender of militants of ULFA was started. This was another organisation, after ULFA, and it was called as SULFA. So, similar kind of activities had been going on. This kind of militancy and the Government's

response to counter-militancy would not prove to be fruitful. All the people of the North-Eastern Region strongly feel that there should be some positive approach. We should have talked and, after the talks, we can say that their point of view is not acceptable and is not reasonable, and we cannot go beyond that. By that way, we can have the opinion of the common people against terrorism. On the basis of the common people's opinion only, terrorism had taken root in that region.

SHRI L.K. ADVANI: The question of extremists surrendering that really has been an important issue. There was an approach earlier in which a kind of an organisation developed by name SULFA. It has its own plus and minus points. I am not going into that. But, presently, this process has been continuing even in the last two years and I would like to inform the House that in the year 1998, 227 extremists surrendered whereas in the year 1999, 970 extremists have surrendered. And the Government's approach is to see that they are absorbed into normal social activity and they are given occupations as far as possible. On the whole, I think, the present approach of the Government in dealing with the problem of extremism in Assam has been yielding positive results in all respects and we propose to continue that.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, while replying to the second supplementary of Mr. Borgohain, the hon. Minister stated that there is a need for isolating these various extremist groups from the popular support. In that connection he also referred to the commitment which the Prime Minister has made, and all of us are aware of the North-Eastern package. My question to the hon. Minister is this. We have been seeing for the last couple of years several packages being announced for the development of the North-Eastern Region, seven sister States taken together. And this is one of the important ingredients of dealing with the problem of insurgency. The recommendation of the Parliamentary Standing Committee which visited some of the North-Eastern States are also to that effect. My pointed question to the Home Minister is whether any institutional arrangement to monitor this overall developmental package is being set up so that the talking points to the people can be highlighted. The second question to which I would like to have an answer from the hon. Minister is in connection with part(a) of his statement where he has stated that apart from NSCN group, the other groups are also encouraged to join dialogue. Here the problem with which the Government is confronted is that once you enter into dialogue with one group, the other raises its demand at a

very high pitch and there is some sort of competitive demands among the various groups because they are not one group but are multiplying endlessly. In that context, I would like to know whether the Government can take an integrated approach,—instead of just entering into dialogue with a particular group and leaving others on the field to raise their demands at a high pitch—and whether the Government can set up a parameter, a broad parameter—not merely that within the framework of the Indian Constitution—of discussion and dialogue and whichever groups agree to the major points, they can enter into dialogue with the Government. In that case, the process of dialogue would facilitate. Otherwise, entering into dialogue with one particular group would encourage splitting and leaveing various other groups to raise their demands at a very high pitch. These are the two questions to which I would like to have reply from the hon. Minister.

SHRI L.K. ADVANI: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the first part of the hon. Member's supplementary relates to the issue of development apart from security. He is very right that even while dealing with insurgency or militancy in the North-Eastern States, the Government must be — and it is — appreciative of the fact that unless security and development go hand-in-hand or go together, security cannot be ensured. And, therefore, it is that only recently, the Prime Minister organised a conference of all the Governors and the Chief Ministers of the North-Eastern States, where, he once again reiterated what the Central Government proposes to do in respect of the development of that region. So far as implementation of these announcements is concerned, there is a cell in the Prime Minister's Office which monitors the process, apart from the North-East Division that has been there in the Ministry of Home Affairs for a long, long time. These two together are expected to monitor the process of development in the North-East and also to see that the announcements made by the Government, from time to time, are implemented.

The second part of the hon. Member's supplementary relates as to how we can co-ordinate the various militant groups and have a dialogue with them jointly. I can only say that this does not depend on us alone because from our side we have expressed our willingness for a dialogue. The response comes from one or two groups, and once we get going with that response and thereafter if anyone else wants to join, we can certainly consider that. But, at the present point of time, this has happened principally in Nagaland and it is what the hon. Member has in mind. And, now, it is possible that militant groups in Assam also may be willing to come within this parameter.

SHRI PRAKANTA WARISA: Mr. Chairman, Sir, it has been widely reported in newspapers that during the negotiations with the Union Government, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland submitted a Map of Greater Nagaland, which includes a portion of the present Karbi-Anglong and North-Cachar Hills Autonomous District of Assam. If so, my question is, whether the Government has conceded to this demand and what is the policy of the Government in this regard.

The second part of my question is, since this area in question is the Sixth Schedule area in Assam, therefore whether the Government has taken authority of the Hill Autononous Council of Karbi-Anglong and North-Cachar Hills into confidence and whether the Government has consulted the autonomous council in this regard?

SHRI L. K. ADVANI: The Government is aware of the desire of certain sections to have a Greater Nagaland. And, we are also aware that some other States of the North-East more particularly, Manipur had been apprehensive about this particular demand. The Government has made it clear that so far as the States of the North-East are concerned, particularly, Manipur, there is no intention on the part of the Government to concede any demand which affects the integrity of those States. So far as the second part of the question is concerned, I would like to submit that the question does not arise out of the main question. If he gives a separate notice, I will answer.

SHRI KHAGEN DAS: Sir, it is estimated that as many as to insurgent organisations are active in the North-Eastern Region. It is known to the Government that the ISI and other foreign agencies are fomenting the trouble in the region in a bid to disrupt the unity and integrity of the country. All the possible measures, including security and development, have to be taken to contain the insurgency. Secondly, there should be an appeal to all the extremists to surrender their arms, return to the normal life and come on to the negotiating table. Part (a) of my supplementary is whether the Central Government is actively considering initiating a dialogue with all the banned outfits of the region, including Tripura for working out a solution. If so, what attempts have so far been made by the Government? For initiating a dialogue,-a congenial atmosphere is required. So, part (b) of my supplementary is whether the Government has anything in mind to appeal to the banned extremist groups, particularly, for a truce.

SHRI L. K. ADVANI: Sir, shortly after becoming the Prime Minister of the country in 1998, Mr. Vajpayee visited the North-Eastern States and made a public statement there that, We would like peace to be restored in this entire region, some of whose parts are affected by militancy. Therefore, we invite all these militant groups for starting a process of dialogue within the framework of the Constitution. And it is in pursuance of that, that we have been taking all decisions, taking all steps. Today, I would say that out of the eight states in the North-East, called the Seven Sisters earlier, and Sikkim, the eighth one, four are peaceful. Militancy, violence, or extortion, etc. are seen in four States. There is one more aspect. For instance, Mizoram, one of the eight States, said that, You provide assistance to those States which are affected by militancy. You give them funds for meeting security-related expenditure. But, we are peaceful; Mizoram is peaceful; what do we get in return? Then we conceived the concept of a peace-bonus which has been implemented this year. The concept is that if there is a State which was at one time gripped by insurgency, but it becomes peaceful; it would get a peacebonus. This is something that we are working on, and the Finance Ministry is doing it. The Prime Minister announced it this time, at Shillong. These are the steps that we are taking to further the peace process. I am confident that in the kind of situation that obtains today, we would gradually be able to bring these States back to normalcy.

DR. RAJA RAMANNA: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I ask this question because for some reasons, the then Chief Minister, Mr. Mohanta, who is the Chief Minister at present also, put me on the Planning Commission of the Assam State. I recall that the feelings of neglect arose there because the royalties that was due to them from oil and such other things came to them very late. The centre taking as much as 4-5 years, as a result all projects were delayed or could not be taken up and people waited in definitely. That is how a lot of insurgent groups begin to emerge. So, the question is, whether any attempts have been made to see that the royalties, coming from the wealth of Assam, reach in time the concerned people at the appropriate time. If it is done, it will reduce a lot of tension there.

SHRI L.K. ADVANI: The hon. Member has drawn attention to a specific problem. I can only say that it is a suggestion for action, which the Government would pursue.

SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI: Sir, many a time, in this House, we have discussed the allegation, and which actually is a fact, that the ULFA activists and other insurgent groups get shelter in the neighbouring States of Bangladesh and Bhutan. I am aware that naturally the responsibility to deal

with these countries is of the Ministry of External Affairs. But the Ministry of Home Affairs has also its own agencies which talk and discuss about these matters with their counterparts in these two countries. In this connection, I want to draw your attention to two facts. One is that, only yesterday, I understand a number of MPs from Assam and other citizens of that State held a *dharna* outside the Bhutanese Embassy and probably elsewhere also. The other is that, I also find that the "Asian Age" today reported about the Assembly proceedings where the Chief Minister is said to have remarked that the Pakistani envoy in Dhaka was aiding ULFA. He has gone on to say that recently, Barmah, the so called Commander-in-Chief of ULFA, got a visa and passport from Dhaka. He also said that while the ULFA activists were prepared to discuss with the Indian authorities, there was pressure from the ISI. Now, in this background, I would like to konw: Will the hon. Home Minister tell the House (a) whether he will take up this matter once again with the Ministry of External Affairs so that this matter can be pursued at that level; and (b) much more than that, what strategy the Ministry of Home Affairs is going to adopt so that its own agencies can discuss these matters much more effectively and adequately with their counterparts in these two countries.

SHRI L.K. ADVANI: Mr Chairman, Sir, the Government is extremely alive to the fact that these militant groups are functioning in the North-East. When they want to take asylum anywhere, when they seek to get away from the Indian security forces, they go into Bangladesh, they go into Bhutan. Not only that, but even the cases of kidnappings that take place for the purpose of extortions take place in Bangladesh. The victims who are kidnapped are very often taken to Bangladesh and are kept there and from there, these operations go on. But I can assure the House that from our side, in respect of both these countries, constant efforts are made to see that the Goverments of these countries do not aid them do not equip them and cooperate with us. So far as Bhutan is concerned, it is certainly the function of the Ministry of External Affairs to keep that dialogue going, but so far as Bangladesh is concerned, we have been continuing the dialogue and our officials from the Ministry of Home Affairs visit Bangladesh, their officials come here. Also, the King of Bhutan had come to India sometime back and we had discussions on this particular aspect in detail, and these discussions are continuing even till today. We are optimistic and confident that with the cooperation of both these countries, we would be able to contain these militant groups which tried to convert those areas into asylums for themselves.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Home Minister has rightly stated that there is an intimate relationship between security and development. In the last three or four years, Prime Ministers whenever they visited the North-Eastern Region, have announced packages, but the harsh reality is that the ordinary people do not see money filtering down to them. In this particular context, Sir, I would like to inform the Home Minister that when our Government was in office, a very prestigious project, namely, the Assam Gas Cracker was approved, for which the Government of India had agreed to give a capital subsidy of Rs. 400 crores because this is a project which has huge employment implications for the youth of Assam. To my knowledge, till this date, nothing concrete has been done to ensure that this project fructifies. Now, I would like to know: Would the Home Minister tell us as to what steps are being taken by the Government to see that Assam Gas Cracker project gets off the ground.

SHRI L.K. ADVANI: Mr. Chiarman, Sir, I would seek a fresh notice for this particular question.

*285. [*The questioner (Shri Shibu Soren) was absent. For anwer, vide Page 23 infra*]

Decline in Textile Exports

*286. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of TEXTILES be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that textiles account for one-third of our total exports;

(b) whether it is also a fact that in 1997-98, textile export growth rate dropped to 4.1 per cent against a growth rate of 15.7 per cent in 1996-97;

(c) if so, what is the reason for this decline; and

(d) what action Government are taking to increase the growth of exports of textiles?

THE MINISTER OF TEXTILES (SHRI KASHIRAM RANA): (a) to (d) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.